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300812Z Jul 04

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001309

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR AGALANEK
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVELLE, D. TEITELBAUM
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
PARIS FOR C. NEARY
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2009

TAGS: PHUM PGOV ZI

SUBJECT: A TALE OF TWO VICTIMS

Classified By: Political Officer Bianca Menendez for reason 1.5 d

1. SUMMARY: Although the media only reports political violence occasionally, most often when it occurs against a prominent individual, Zimbabwe continues to suffer from a steady level of unreported violence that often is devastating to the victims. The opposition is unable to protect its people, and the police often refuse to. Even the judiciary is ineffectual in protecting either side from the effects. END SUMMARY.

GEORGE'S TALE

2. (C) George, a former employee of the postal service and a district level organizing secretary for the opposition MDC, came to the Embassy July 27 hoping for help. According to George, his difficulties began one night when he opened his door to a group of ZANU-PF youths brandishing sticks and iron bars. He slammed his door shut and screamed for help as the group surrounded his home and began breaking the windows. He escaped from the house, leaving his sisters and young brother behind, and ran to a neighbor who phoned the police. The police finally showed up at 2 am, by which point both he and one of his sisters had been assaulted, and his house had been looted and nearly demolished. The youths left only a shell of the structure standing. Anything valuable was taken; everything else was destroyed. George made a formal report to the police and even identified some of his attackers, but the police never followed up.

3. (C) George has since given up his job, after receiving thinly veiled threats from the postmaster general that the postal service did not employ MDC supporters. As a result, he, his wife and children, and his sisters and brothers, all of whom he was supporting, are now living with other relatives. He went to his party for help. Officials took his report and informed him that they had no funds to assist. Post referred him to staff at the International Committee of the Red Cross, who said they could lead him to the right resources to get assistance.

BOB MAKONE'S TALE

4. (U) ZWNNews reported on July 26 that Bob Makone, brother of senior MDC official Ian Makone and brother-in-law of MDC candidate for Parliament Theresa Makone, was abducted and tortured. According to the article, he was abducted by ZANU-PF youths, taken to a rally held by Minister of Education Aeneas Chigwedere, then tortured overnight before being released the next day. The same youths returned to the Makone home to threaten his sister-in-law with death for planning to run for Parliament.

COMMENT

5. (C) Bob Makone's story exemplifies the kind of political violence that is reported in what remains of the independent press here. Although these stories appear with alarming regularity, they represent only an unknown fraction of the systemic background violence against people like George. Violence against these people has a lasting effect on entire families, because they often cannot rebuild what they have lost. The extended family is also taxed to help care for the victims who, like George, may find themselves out of a job. Some may find that the cost of their support for the opposition is too high to be worthwhile, and cease political participation completely.

6. (SBU) Political violence here generally is not lethal. NGOs tracking political violence have recorded only three political murders this year, ten last year. Political murders in 2002, the last year with a national election, exceeded 200, which raises concerns over the possibility of escalating violence in the coming months as the 2005 parliamentary

elections approach. Nonetheless, perpetrators of violence here seem to calculate that their advantage is maximized by having victims live to spread the word about the consequences of opposing the ruling party.

17. (C) With scant resources, the MDC can not help its own members and officials who are victims of such violence. The police refuse to respond and protect MDC members, and the courts prove ineffectual in cases involving political violence. The lesson to the population at large is one of the opposition's main handicaps: activism for the MDC can bring pain and ruin with little prospect for reward.

18. (C) MDC youths, many of whom are impatient with their leaders' attempts to work within the system and negotiate with ZANU-PF, and who are tired of seeing the kind of violence directed at people like George, represent an important constituency of the MDC. If levels of ruling party intimidation increase, as is expected in the run-up to the elections scheduled for March, the MDC leadership may find it harder to keep a lid on a latent impetus for violence among many rank and file.

WEISENFELD